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HUMOR

Puppy love

Every dog has its gay

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARC
 by Marc Acito



Men are dogs. I must confess I've never understood this expression, although I've known lots of gay guys who are real bitches. Not to mention a good number who like to sniff each other's butts.

But to liken men to dogs is, well, kind of insulting to dogs, I think. Sure, dogs drool, they smell, they eat cat poop if you let them, but nowhere else will you find the kind of unconditional devotion they can give you.

Full disclosure: I am a canine lover. Dog hair is a food group in my house. But what you don't know is that my dog is a superhero.

You wouldn't know it

to look at him. Despite being named after a tank, Sherman is actually just a 10-pound, black and white Pekingese, about the size of a well-fed cat. When he's asleep in a corner he could easily be mistaken for an electric shoe polisher.

You see, my partner and I aren't like those outdoorsy gay guys who try to butch it up by owning dogs usually associated with lesbians—dogs like black Labs and golden retrievers. No, my friends, Floyd and I are of that vanishing breed of queens who will never own a large dog because its wagging tail might knock over the Steuben.

Pekingese are classified as "toy" dogs, and I understand why. Sherman is less a dog in the "sit/stay/heel" sense of the word and more like a stuffed animal with a circulatory system. With his big, round eyes and shmushed-in face, he reminds me of Gizmo in *Gremlins*.

But he's a superhero, all right. He's Sherman, the Amazing Vomiting Dog. He's less likely to "go fetch" than "go retch," and his barf is definitely worse than his bite.

What's more, the very moment he's emptied the contents of his stomach, the first thing he does is run to his dish for more.

"He's just excitable," Floyd says.

"No, he's just bulimic," I say.

I blame myself, of course. If I weren't so weight-obsessed, I'm sure Sherman would realize he's just fine the way he is.

But my dog is not a likely candidate for superherodom. Not only did he flunk obedience school, but he was rejected as a stud puppy because his legs were too long. (Only in the bizarre world of dog shows would 4 inches be considered too long.)

Sherman does pull his weight, however—all 10 pounds of it. For the five years that Floyd and I had our business, Sherman came to work with us. His job was to greet customers and be adorable—a task for which he is infinitely well qualified.

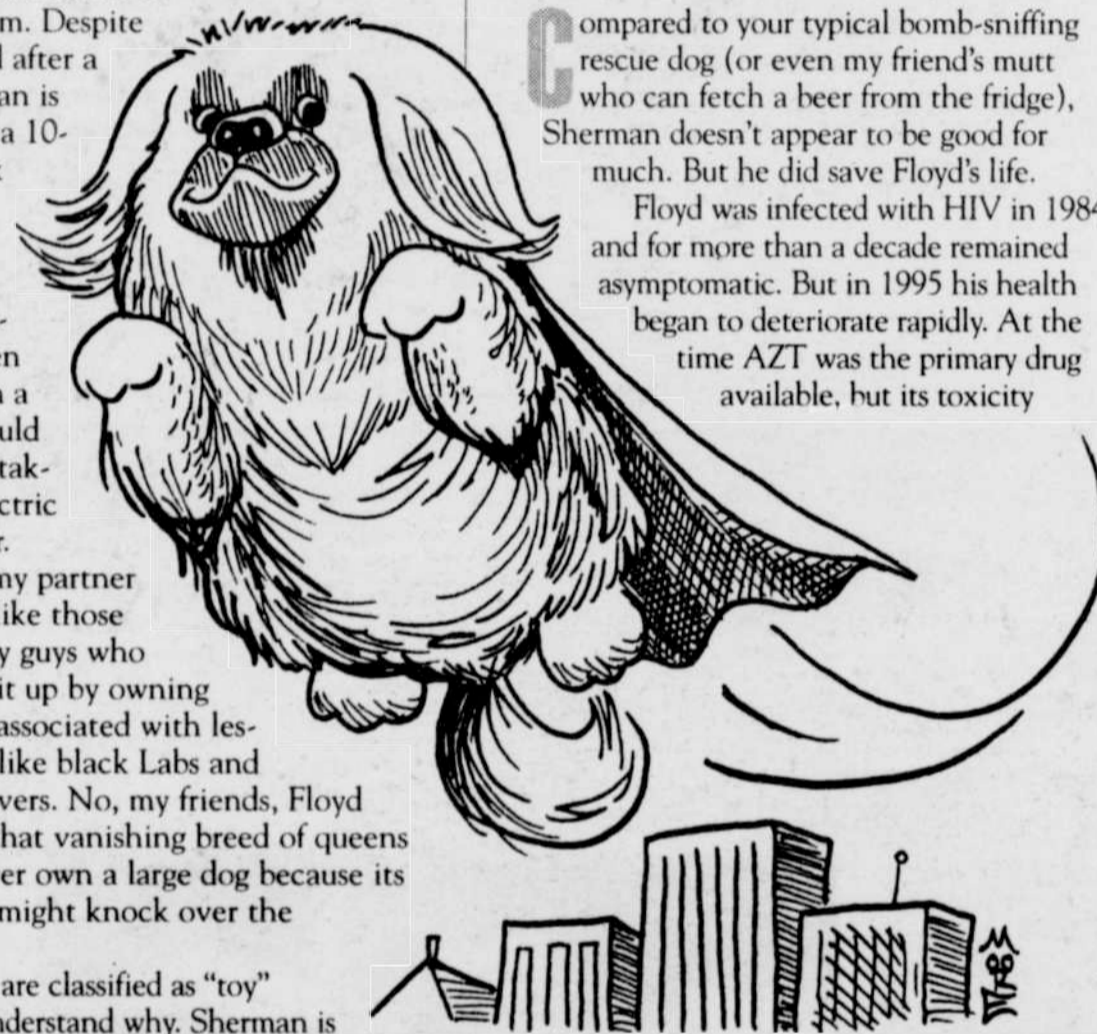
While most customers loved him, we did discover that very observant Muslims would refuse to step in the door until Sherman had been locked in back. Apparently in Islam dogs are considered unclean, and coming

into the slightest contact with them means you must re-perform your ablutions.

With the current state of heightened alert, I say forget about arming airline pilots; let's just park a Pekingese in front of the cockpit door and call it done.

Compared to your typical bomb-sniffing rescue dog (or even my friend's mutt who can fetch a beer from the fridge), Sherman doesn't appear to be good for much. But he did save Floyd's life.

Floyd was infected with HIV in 1984 and for more than a decade remained asymptomatic. But in 1995 his health began to deteriorate rapidly. At the time AZT was the primary drug available, but its toxicity



only made him more ill, so we were faced with the grim prospect of a long, debilitating goodbye.

Floyd slept through most of what we've come to refer to as the "Winter of our Discontent"—sometimes as much as 16 hours a day—partly out of depression, but mostly because he was frail and weak.

But then the Sherminator came to his rescue. The moment that ball of fluff came rolling into our lives, Floyd's health immediately improved; despite utter fatigue, he wanted to get out of bed in the morning just so he could know what the little puppy was doing. He wanted to hold him and brush him and play with him. I'm not exaggerating when I say it gave him the will to live.

And he's not alone. In a study of 150 cardiac patients, for instance, 7 percent of those who did not own a dog died within the first year, compared with only 1 percent of those who did.

Of course, the triple cocktail became available that spring and as the earth awoke from its winter slumber so did Floyd—returning to new life and blossoming again. But we both know that he was rescued by that little dog.

I told you he was a superhero.

And that, my friends, is *The Gospel According to Marc*. ☐

MARC ACITO would like to hear about your canine superheroes. Write him at marcacito@attbi.com.